



FACT SHEET

Disease Prevention

for Parents and Childcare Providers

Safe Food Temperatures

Children get sick more often and more easily than adults. They are at higher risk for almost all diseases, including foodborne illness. They have a higher risk for more severe illness, complications, and sometimes even death.

Bacteria

There are millions of bacteria everywhere in our environment. Luckily, only a few types of bacteria, called species, cause disease. Bacteria require nutrients to grow, and our food is an excellent source of nutrients. Some of the food we bring into our home already has bacteria on it when we purchase it. Bacteria grow by dividing, sometimes every 20 minutes or so under the right conditions, so in a matter of hours a few bacteria can become thousands or millions. We need to work hard to keep those bacteria from causing illness.

Foods that Grow Bacteria

“Potentially hazardous foods” are foods that support the growth of disease causing bacteria. These include meat, eggs, seafood, dairy products including butter, casseroles, cooked pasta, cooked rice and beans, soups, stews, cooked vegetables, cut melons, soybean products such as tofu and garden burgers, cream pies, cheesecakes, cream cheese icing, batters, sauces, gravies, raw sprouts, cut raw fruits and vegetables, and oil containing garlic, onion, or herbs. Non-potentially hazardous foods, or those that do not support bacterial growth, include mustard, ketchup, cookies, bread, most uncut raw produce, raisins, chocolate, coffee, and vinegar.

Foodborne Illness

Bacteria that have been associated with foodborne illness include *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *E.coli*, *Yersinia*, *Listeria*, *Shigella*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Clostridium botulinum* (botulism), *Clostridium perfringens*, *Clostridium difficile*, *Bacillus cereus*, and *Vibrio*. Food that contains these bacteria does not look, smell, or taste bad or different. Some of these bacteria have caused severe disease, even death, in children.

Over ⇒

Keep It Cold

Storing food at a safe temperature is an easy way to help protect our children against disease. Most bacteria that cause foodborne illness grow very slowly at temperatures of 41°F or colder. If we make sure that our refrigerator is at a safe temperature and limit the time that potentially hazardous food is on the counter, in the car, in a backpack, or in some other warm place, then we can prevent disease.

Using a Thermometer

Your refrigerator should maintain 41°F or colder at all times. The best way to check the temperature on your refrigerator is to purchase a thermometer from the grocery or kitchen specialty store. Put the thermometer towards the front of the refrigerator where you can easily see it. If it does not read 41° F or colder, the refrigerator may need to be serviced, opened less often, or stocked with less food.

If you are going somewhere and need to take food with you, pack food between cold packs or ice in a cooler and carry your thermometer with the food to be sure that it stays cold. If potentially hazardous food does get left out, use it or throw it away within 2 hours.

Keep It Hot

Bacteria that are associated with foodborne illness are mostly killed by cooking. In order to prevent growth after cooking you must maintain a temperature above 140° F. or use it within 4 hours. If it is left out for 4 hours, it CANNOT be safely cooled and reheated; throw it out.

Keep It Safe

Remember, bacteria that have been associated with foodborne illness do not produce an odor, taste, or visible sign when they grow in food. The only way to know your food is safe is to handle it carefully. Keep food:

- Cold at 41°F or less
- Hot at 140°F or above

Keep potentially hazardous foods either hot or cold, and don't provide a happy home for disease causing bacteria in your food.

Please contact us at (406) 447-8352 with any questions that you may have.